

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SEEKS INPUT TO REDUCE
OBESITY IN THE STATE**

(Richmond, Va.) –Beginning in March, the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) will host eight planning meetings to get input from residents on how to prevent and control obesity in the state. VDH is inviting representatives from school, civic, business, government, medical and faith organizations to participate in the Commonwealth's Healthy Approach and Mobilization Plan for Inactivity, Obesity and Nutrition, or CHAMPION.

CHAMPION is designed to help communities combat obesity in Virginia. At the day-and-a-half sessions, participants will clarify the scope of the obesity problem in their region, identify factors that contribute to the prevention and control of obesity and make program and policy recommendations.

"Obesity is a serious problem for Virginia. It shortens people's lives, affects the quality of life, and has serious economic consequences," said State Health Commissioner, Robert B. Stroube, M.D., M.P.H.

A 2002 health department survey revealed that 58.8 percent of Virginia adults are overweight or obese. In 2003, the total estimated costs related to overweight and obesity in Virginia were approximately \$1.6 billion, according to a study conducted by the Research Triangle Institute International and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

CHAMPION is a product of the health department's obesity briefing, "Virginia's Expanding Waistline, How it Affects the Bottomline," which was held in September 2004. It also builds on the accomplishments of Governor Warner's "Healthy Virginians" initiative. CHAMPION's goals are to develop a strategic plan that addresses obesity in Virginia and to compile a statewide electronic resource guide, including a directory of community and state programs and access to data relative to obesity in the Commonwealth.

"We will use CHAMPION to focus state and community efforts to address obesity issues for all Virginians in their respective communities," said Donna Seward, director of the health department's Division of WIC and Community Nutrition Services. "We can do this by creating a united effort among diverse stakeholders and by equipping communities with a strategic plan to decrease obesity among their residents."

Regional meetings will be held as follows:

- Wytheville- March 9 and 10 at the Holiday Inn Wytheville
- Roanoke- March 23 and 24 at the Hotel Roanoke & Conference Center
- Harrisonburg- April 6 and 7 at the Four Points Sheraton
- Sandston- April 20 and 21 at the Doubletree Hotel Richmond Airport
- Fairfax- May 4 and 5 at the Hilton Garden Inn
- Newport News- May 18 and 19 at the Omni Newport News Hotel

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VDH will also conduct two separate meetings: on March 16 and 17 for participants and managers of public assistance programs such as Food Stamps and Medicaid and another on May 25 and 26 for health care providers such as physicians, hospitals and insurance companies. Both meetings will be held in Richmond at the Sheraton Richmond West Hotel.

All meetings will be held from 8:30 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. on day one and 8:30 a.m. until 12:00 p.m. on day two.

To register for the meetings and to learn more about the CHAMPION program visit www.vahealth.org/wic/champion.htm.

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